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AUTHOR Horwood, Bert
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ABSTRACT

Project WILD, a Canadian elementary school curriculum supplement about wildlife and the environment, is seriously flawed in that it presents a human-centered view of the world while purporting to be unbiased. This anthropocentric perspective, in which humans are alienated from the environment and in control of nature by technological means, is in sharp contrast to the biocentric view, which emphasizes the relationships among all living things, including humans. Evidence of Project WILD's anthropocentric bias includes: (1) a preponderance of photographs of humans, human artifacts, and animals that humans like or resemble; (2) exclusion of humans from its scheme of wildlife classification; (3) lack of activities that teach the stated concept of wildlife's intrinsic value, although each of five other stated values has 9 to 15 teaching activities; and (4) lack of activities that illustrate man's position in the "food web." Although anthropocentrism has long been a fundamental assumption of European culture, it has failed to provide a sustained, healthy biosphere. There is a place in the curriculum for materials like Project WILD, provided they are suitably labeled, but there should also be room for criticisms of anthropocentric assumptions and presentations of the biocentric view. This paper includes 20 references. (SV)

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WHO SPEAKS FOR WOLF? NOT PROJECT WILD.

Bert Horwood

Faculty of Education,
Queen's University,
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3N6

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WHO SPEAKS FOR WOLF? NOT PROJECT WILD.

BERT HORWOOD

> There is an Iroquoian tale about a village where the gardens and the hunting had become unreliable. The people resolved to find a new place. All but one of the scouting parties returned with unfavourable reports. The good report was hard to believe. It told of a land rich in forests, clearings, game and fish. The only disadvantage was that this region was the home of the wolves. The people ignored warnings that they had not heard anyone speak on behalf of the wolves and moved the village.
>
> At first everything was exactly as promised. The clearings produced fine crops of beans, squash and corn. There was game and fish in plenty. But soon the wolves began to prowl closer and closer. The people tried various ways to make peace with the wolves. They put out food, kept watch, tried not to interfere. Nothing worked. The wolves became bolder and bolder. At length, so much energy was used to keep off the wolves that there was not enough energy to tend the gardens and hunt. The people were forced to move again.
>
> From this experience these people learned a lesson. Thereafter, whenever an important decision had to be made, one of the elders would rise in council and ask, "Tell me my sisters, tell me my brothers, who speaks for wolf?" (Spencer, 1983.)

There is a serious fundamental flaw in Project WILD (Canadian Wildlife Federation, 1985, 1986). The flaw is hard to find because the materials are presented so attractively. The book is highly polished both in style and organization. The book is also available only as a gift to teachers after they have participated in a full day authorized workshop. The workshops are invariably energetic, informative and inspiring. It is hard to have a critical

frame of mind towards exciting curriculum materials delivered in such an appealing way. The purpose of this paper is to describe the flaw and to outline the case for not using Project WILD as directed.

Notwithstanding its attractive features and its repeated claims to be balanced and objective, Project WILD has a profound bias toward one particular view of the world (Siegenthaler, 1986). This view is that the natural world exists to serve the needs and wants of human kind. Humans are treated as though they were separate from the rest of the biosphere. WILD's human-centred (anthropocentric) perspective is supported by the high value placed on management as the means to achieve human goals.

There is at least one alternate view of the world not represented in Project WILD. That view puts the entire biosphere at the centre of its concern (biocentric). In this perspective, humans are treated with the same importance as all other parts of the biosphere. The biosphere is recognized to be self regulating and evolving (Vallentyne, 1986). Management is much less important in the biocentric view.

In this paper, I describe some distinctions between the human centred and biosphere centred perspectives, offer evidence from Project WILD to suppport the claim that it has an overpowering human centred bias and suggest a more appropriate approach to curriculum materials related to the environment.

TWO VIEWS OF THE WORLD

This section provides a brief outline of the two views of the world, anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Neil Evernden (1985) has written a very useful and comprehensive analysis of human relationships in the environment and the summary below is influenced by that work and others.

A human centred view of the world comes easily for humans and is not necessarily wrong. It is the common way that our culture has of understanding and valueing relationships within the realm of living things. It provides a way of ordering the relative importance of creatures and environments This is the perspective that informs the belief that it is all right for people to eat sharks, but it is not all right for sharks to eat people.

The biocentric view is found less commonly in our culture, but has persisted in aboriginal cultures. It serves the same purpose of providing a framework for understanding the relationships among living things. The biocentric perspective is based less on an ordering of creatures in terms of importance as it is based on the principle of respect. This is the view that informs the belief that animals should be thanked for providing their flesh for human food; that it is all right for humans to eat sharks and for sharks to eat humans.

An important tenet in anthropocentrism is that humans are outside nature. This goes along with believing that objectivity is more valuable than subjectivity as an approach

to problems. Detachment and separation from the natural environment is part of the human centred perspective. Detachment, when developed, leads to estrangement, alienation and ultimate denial of the intrinsic value of the rest of the animate and inanimate world. Anthropocentrism is associated with the desire to predict and control nature, to reduce natural fluctuations, to make nature tidy. Attempting these things leads to problems which are answered by applying increasingly large technological remedies. All activity growing out of a human centred view of the world has prolonged, advanced, civilized human life as its highest good.

By contrast, a central conviction of biocentrism is that humans are inside nature. This goes along with believing that there is a place for both objectivity and subjectivity in dealing with problems. Human integration as part of the natural environment is part of the biosphere centred perspective. Attachment, when developed, leads to recognition of relationship, a sense of kinship and eventual identity with the rest of the world (Naess, 1985). This perspective leads one to understand that the world is full of beings with lives and contexts of their own. It accepts the uncertainty associated with natural cycles and recognizes the related changes and evolution. In the biocentric view, nature is messy and what problems occur can only be answered by natural fixes. The highest good is the prolonged wild life of the entire biosphere and no species has greater claim for privilege than another (Fox, 1987).

J.R.R. Tolkein, although writing fiction, vividly characterizes the two points of view.

> I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things except as far as they serve him for the moment. (1966a p76.)
>
> Never before had he been so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin, and the life within it. He felt a delight in the wood and the touch of it, neither as a forester nor as carpenter, it was the delight of the living tree itself. (1966b p115.)

A simple anecdote of unKnown origin illustrates the differences in the two views:

> A man was driving to town for the day and noticed his neighbour holding a pig up into the apple tree. The pig was eating the apples. Some hours later, on the return trip, the man noticed that the neighbour was still holding the pig up to reach more apples. He stopped the car and walked into the yard.
> "You've been holding that pig up there all day?" he asked.
> "Yup," said the neighbour.
> "That's been an awful long time, hasn't it?"
> "What's time to a pig?" was the reply.

The point is that a person's understanding and actions are strongly influenced by their image of their place in the natural world. My claim is that the word "wild" can be applied accurately only to the biocentric view (Horwood, 1986). The anthropocentric view is tame and domesticated and should be recognized as such. If Project WILD can be shown to be anthropocentric, then it is seriously misrepresented by its title and its claim to be free of bias.

The next question to be addressed here is the what is Project WILD about? To what extent does Project WILD emphasize one of these views over the other? A further question, what environmental values should the schools be teaching, having regard for the current state of affairs in the environment, is discussed at the end.

WHAT PROJECT WILD IS ABOUT

Introductory sections in the Project WILD book, and statements of authorized Project WILD instructors in workshops for teachers assert that the Project WILD lessons and materials are value neutral. "... Project Wild is concerned with providing information and helping students evaluate choices and thereby make reasonable decisions." (Candian Wildlife Federation, 1986, p xi.) "Project WILD does not teach you what to think, but how to think about management," said one workshop leader. "We are proud of ... our strict efforts at balance and objectivity ..." (p ix). The claim to neutrality and balance is often asserted and is a central part of the instruction to teachers before handing over to them copies of the book itself. There can be little doubt that Project WILD asserts that it is unbiassed and claims not to be trying to teach any one particular point of view.

The Project WILD book is a highly polished production. There are short introductory passages followed by 81 lesson activities on various aspects of wildlife, each with

objectives, background information, methods, materials, keys to the conceptual scheme and related lessons, vocabulary to be developed and ideas for variations and evaluation. The lessons are easily accessed through excellent indices organized by grade, skills, school subject, topic, location and activity title . There is also a reasonably complete glossary and a detailed conceptual framework. The book is profusely illustrated with striking black and white photographs. It is intended for teachers of elementary grades, although in my own practice I have found that most activities are easily adapted to adolescents and adults.

The first test I made of WILD's claim to neutrality was to study the photographs in the revised version (Canadian Wildlife Federation, 1986). It was impressive to find so many carefully chosen photographs in a book which was published by a charitable organization to be given as gifts to teachers by the tens of thousands. It promised to be worthwhile to determine what sort of message the illustrations contained. I counted the photographs in categories according to the dominant subject portrayed. The photograph was counted more than once if it had more than one subject. For example, on page 128 there is a picture of a starfish on a person's hand. That was counted as one for the starfish and one for the humans.

Some categories of photographs were chosen based on the words of the text. For example, WILD defines wildlife to include microscopic animals, indeed all animals that are not domesticated. Therefore, the pictures of microscopic animals

were counted. Similarly, the text refers to parasites and there are several activities dealing with sources of food for wildlife, which of course includes parasites, so the number of parasites illustrated was also checked. The counts included major groups of animals and other categories, such as plants and human artifacts as dictated by the photographs themselves. Table 1 gives the results of the photograph count.

TABLE 1. Numbers of different kinds of wild animals and other subjects portrayed in photographs as dominant subjects in Project WILD.

Category of photograph subject	Number	Totals
Microscopic animals	0	
Insects	5	
Other arthropods	3	Total arthropods 8
Parasites	0	
Other invertebrates	3	Total invertebrates 11
Humans	32	
Other mammals	29	Total mammals 61
Birds	35	
Other vertebrates	12	Total other vertebrates 47
		Total vertebrates 108
Plants	31	
Human artifacts	19	Total non-wildlife 50

It is clear from the choice of photographs in Project WILD, that there has been no attempt to illustrate the nature and range of wildlife as the text defines it. Not only is there an extraordinary preponderance of vertebrate animals portrayed, there are nearly five times more plants and human artifacts than there are invertebrate animals. Yet invertebrate animals represent the larger part of the world

of wildlife both in terms of numbers and kinds by several orders of magnitude. How can we understand this misrepresentation of the animal kingdom?

The distribution of photographs is not consistent with the actual state of affairs in the wild world, but is consistent with the human centred perspective. The photographs emphasize human beings, the works of their hands and the animals that humans like most or resemble most. The illustration of Project WILD quietly but powerfully promotes the anthropocentric image of the world. It presents pictures of the most important features in that world view. It is hard to imagine that the producers of the book chose the least important images to embellish their work.

The failure of WILD to support its definitions with consistent photographic imagery is paralleled by its failure to account for human beings either within the definition of wild animals or of domesticated animals. It is common for WILD teacher training workshops to begin with participants making a name tag for themselves and writing the name of one kind of wildlife on the tag. In four different sessions involving about 100 people, 40 of whom were WILD trained teachers, not one person put "human" on their name tag. In the book, people are almost always named separately from wildlife, for example, section five is entitled "People, Culture and Wildlife," (p xiv). And an activity is entitled, "Planning for People and Wildlife," (p 205). Project WILD does not place humans into its scheme of classification. We are assumed to be <u>outside</u> the natural system being studied

despite that fact that the definition of "wild" given in the glossary clearly includes human beings. This assumption is characteristic of the human centred perspective and is not found in the biosphere centred view.

I made another test of Project WILD's neutrality by studying the Conceptual Framework, particularly the section on values (p 257-258). Here, there are six main concepts, five stated, without qualificaton, in the form "Wildlife has commercial value." The five values attributed to wildlife are aesthetic (includes spiritual), recreational, commercial, social and ecological. The sixth concept of value is not stated in this directly unqualifed language. Instead, it runs, "Wildlife has intrinsic value, although humans often only recognize values based upon human wants and needs." This concept is worth further investigation because it is part of the biocentric perspective and if it were developed and taught in the activities, then there would be evidence that WILD was in fact presenting balance between different ways of understanding the environment. But why is the concept of intrinsic value not simply asserted like the other concepts?

I looked for activities directly related to teaching the concept "Wildlife has aesthetic value." There are five. I looked for activities directly related to teaching the concept "Wildlife has intrinsic value, although ..." There are none. Then I searched the Topic Index in order to locate the activities which both directly and indirectly supported teaching the concepts on the values of wildlife. Table 2.

gives the results of the search and shows that there are multiple ways (between 9 and 15) of teaching the first five concepts, but there is no way of teaching the "intrinsic value" concept. Indeed, intrinsic value is not listed in the Topic Index, nor in the Glossary, even though the idea appears in the Conceptual Framework and is mentioned in the Preface (p vii).

Table 2. Numbers of activities listed in Project WILD's Topic Index supporting each of the value concepts listed in the Conceptual Framework.

Value Topic	Number of Activities
aesthetic value	15
commercial value	15
ecological value	13
historical value	15
intrinsic value (not listed)	0
recreational value	9

A fourth way to test for the presence of biocentrism is to examine how Project WILD treats trophic relationships in general and in particular with respect to human beings. The notion of "food chain" is well represented but the more accurate and perceptive notion of "food web," reflecting the reality of multiple food sources is absent. Predation is the main trophic idea taught in several activities, but humans are not counted as predators in them. Four activities do relate to human food, but the ideas are limited to sources and energy implications. One activity allows for treatment of the human as predator. The key biocentric idea that every living thing kills to live is missing. There are no activities that give awareness to the students that each of

them relies on someone to kill their food for them. There are no activities (with the possible exception of "The Hunter") that teach the appropriate sensitivities and toughness of the obligate predator. Indeed, some activities suggest that it is a debatable matter as to whether or not animals (including humans) should be allowed to kill. There are no activities that show human beings as food for other wildlife. The point is that to exclude these things is to exclude the biocentric view.

Finally, it is instructive to compare the declared purposes of Project WILD with the analyses above. The book states that the Project intends to enable students to make informed choices about the environment (pp vii, ix). The same introductory sections also assert that "Project WILD is a people programme" (p ix) and works by bringing "together two key elements: resource management and education" (p v). My point is that Project WILD restricts the range of student choice and decision-making by limiting the activities and lessons to those which promote one particular world view.

It is not exaggerating the substance and structure of Project WILD to say that it neglects ideas that lead teachers and pupils toward a biocentric perspective. Through this neglect, one particular way of understanding the environment and our place in it is promoted. This is the human centred view. To become consistent, Project WILD would need to either undertake a major revision to give equal emphasis to biocentrism, or more simply, recognize that the sponsors of Project WILD wish to promote anthropocentrism and abandon the

claim to neutrality. This could be done easily by minor amendments and by changing the title. An appropriate and accurate acronym for the book as it stands now is "Project TAME: Toward A Managed Environment".

WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT?

It is clear that Project WILD promotes the anthropocentric view of the natural world. The question is whether or not, as a curriculum supplement carrying strong Government endorsement in an at least one jurisdiction (Province of Ontario, Canada), it should do so. A more balanced form of the question is, what ought the schools to be teaching about views of the environment. Out of which framework should curriculum be constructed?

Anthropocentrism is a widely held perspective. It has roots in Judeo-Christian tradition and in Platonic and Cartesian philosophies. It has been the practical driving force of the European pioneers in converting the North American wilderness into immense tracts of cultivated and managed terrain (Nash, 1982). It could be argued that anthropocentrism is a fundamental assumption of the European culture wherever it is found. It suits us. To the extent that the schools should reflect and enhance the deep values of society, then Project WILD is as it should be.

However, as it becomes possible to see the failure of anthropocentric action to provide a sustained, healthy biosphere, there is a growing interest among people to

explore biocentrism as a superior basis for understanding the world and living in it over prolonged periods of time (Drengson, 1986). A growing body of writing, including academic and scholarly work, for example see Devall and Sessions (1985), popular writing (for example see Abbey, 1975) and literature (for example, Wilcox and Gorsline, 1986) supports the interest in biosphere centred thinking. Proponents of biocentrism also find support from early American thinkers like Thoreau and from the value systems of the North American Indians. Biocentrism appeals, not because it is easy, nor profitable, but because it offers hope for the long term continuity of life which anthropocentrism has shown itself incapable of providing.

It is unrealistic to expect that anthropocentric orientations would disappear from curriculum overnight. And there are many persons who will defend the suitability of the human centred perspective as the only appropriate way to deal with the environment. Therefore, there is a place for materials like Project WILD, provided that they were suitably labelled and not misrepresented as telling the whole story. But there is an equally great need for the presence of ways to examine anthropocentric assumptions critically and to have alternative views, like biocentrism available for study and use. Curriculum materials have messages and they should be organized in ways that promote awareness of their assumptions and the existence of significant alternatives (Olson, 1983).

Fortunately, there are many teaching resources available which could be used to present the biocentric view. This

paper is not the place to provide detailed accounts of them. But there is excellent literature, ranging from Dr. Seuss to Margaret Atwood. The Institute for Earth Education has biocentrically oriented teaching materials most of which are easily integrated into any school curriculum (Van Matre, 1972, 1974, 1979). Where government agencies support the introduction and use of Project WILD in schools there should be adoption of material of comparable quality and cost promoting biocentrism.

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